Anchor **by m11kewheeler**

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)
Genre: Cute hand holding, F/M, Fluff, Friendship
Language: English
Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Will Byers
Relationships: Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Eleven/Mike Wheeler
Status: Completed
Published: 2016-09-05
Updated: 2016-09-05
Packaged: 2022-03-31 22:54:40
Rating: General Audiences
Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply
Chapters: 1
Words: 616
Publisher: archiveofourown.org
Summary:

Eleven returns home, broken and scared, and Mike wants nothing more than to comfort her until she's okay.

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Author's Note:

> Based off a prompt I got on tumblr. Follow me @ m11kewheeler :)

This wasn't real. Mike was just dreaming. He *had* to be. But no matter how hard he pinched himself and squeezed his eyes closed, every time he opened them Eleven still stood before him, shaking and whimpering like a lost puppy.

He had so many questions. *Where did she go? How did Hopper find her? What happened to her? What was going to happen now that she was back?* But Mike knew that it would be a long while before she would talk about what happened.

Hopper and Joyce brought her over to Mike's house, and Lucas, Dustin, and Will arrived shortly after. The boys took one look at the scared, broken girl and silently agreed on a sleepover in Mike's basement. Without uttering a word, Mike opened the closet and took out enough sleeping bags, blankets, and pillows to keep them all warm and comfortable. Mrs. Wheeler had offered to let them sleep in the living room but Mike shook his head. They were all much more comfortable in the basement. To Eleven, it was home.

"Where do you want to sleep, El?" Mike asked softly after setting the sleeping bags up in a row of five.

"Middle," she mumbled. Mike nodded and fluffed up her pillow.

"You're safe here, El," Lucas said, putting a hand on her shoulder. She flinched slightly but quickly apologized.

Eleven stepped into her sleeping bag, Mike and Dustin joining either side of her in their own. Lucas and Will claimed the two ends. Mike heard Eleven suck in a huge breath the second he turned the lights out and immediately grabbed her hand. "It's okay," he whispered.

Eleven nodded in the dark but kept ahold of Mike's hand tightly. "I

want to tell you," she said, her voice thick with tears.

Mike shook his head, then realized she couldn't see him. "When you're ready."

"You okay, El?" Dustin asked, turning over to face her.

"Yes," she said. "I am now."

Dustin reached his arm over and patted her head soothingly, something his own mother did to him when he was upset.

Eleven felt more tears well up behind her eyes, trying to keep them from falling, but ultimately failing. As the tears kept sliding down her cheeks, her hand stayed gripped with Mike's, almost as an anchor. Mike was her anchor. They all were.

Judging from their deep, even breathing, Eleven could tell that everyone else was now fast asleep. Well, almost everyone.

"I'll stay up with you until you fall asleep, okay?" Mike said, trying to conceal his yawn.

"Tell me a story," Eleven whispered.

"What kind of story?"

"A happy one."

"Okay, um…" Mike thought for a moment. "Once upon a time, there were three boys who were lonely. They would sit in the basement playing Dungeons and Dragons every day, but they needed someone else. Another friend to fill the empty seat. Then one day a new boy showed up at school. He had curly hair and talked weird, and people laughed at him. But the three boys looked at him and instantly knew he would be their fourth member…" Mike went on and told Eleven the story of how Dustin became friends with them, pausing every so often to see if she was still awake. She was. In fact, she was hanging on to every word. They way Mike told the story brought a smile to her face, a smile she hadn't felt on herself in a long time.

"It's okay to close your eyes," Mike said, snapping Eleven back to

reality. "Nobody's going to hurt you. I won't let anything happen."

"Promise?"

Mike smirked and squeezed her hand. "Do you even have to ask?"